1: Melamid K-4 (no date) 1953 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4 Qatar MK3

tively recent, since none of the earlier observers comment much on them. Wood and sailcloth for boats have to be imported from a distance, a situation that may have seriously hampered these occupations in the past. In view of the absence of a hinterland and the poverty of the shore, there seems to have been little opportunity for trade. Recently the export (probably smuggled) to Iran of imported sugar and textiles is reported to have grown, but no statistics are available.

Armed interference with the ships plying the ancient trade routes from India and East Africa to Basra and the West through the Strait of Hormuz and the narrow funnel of the Persian Gulf was the major source of income for the inhabitants. The area became known as the "Pirate Coast," a name still found on many maps. Attacks on British ships took place as late as 1905, and the attack on a large Arab dhow in 1944 has been reported.[4] Prevention of piracy would have required the constant presence of relatively large fleets to block the many inlets into which the pirates could withdraw their small ships. An alternative would have been the occupation of the whole coast—a costly procedure, and hardly worth while economically. Therefore trading powers in the Persian Gulf, such as the Portuguese in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the Moslem empires before and after, limited their repression of piracy to occasional raids ashore in which one or two main pirate strongholds would be captured and held for a short time. Obviously, such measures were neither effective nor permanent.

From the end of the eighteenth century on, British trade in the Persian Gulf became increasingly important, and after many vicissitudes a British fleet was dispatched in 1819–1820 to punish and eliminate the pirates. After the usual bombardments the sheikhs of the coast were made to sign a solemn agreement not to fight one another; this was supposed to remove the main cause of piracy. Further, they promised to refrain themselves from piracy and to suppress it among their subjects. However, as soon as the British fleet withdrew, the agreement was broken. After another show of British arms, another treaty was signed by the sheikhs in 1835. Unlike the earlier agreement, the covenant of 1835 did not provide for universal peace, but only for a maritime truce: the sheikhs agreed not to fight one another on the sea, or to engage themselves, or permit their subjects to engage, in piracy—war on land was still permitted. In return, the British government agreed not to interfere in the internal affairs of the sheikhdoms, including their many land wars. Perhaps because of this unique outlet for the energies of the sheikhs

[4] For example, by O'Shea, *op. cit.*, p. 116

1: Melamid K-4 (no date) 1953 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4
Qatar MK3

In addition, water-distilling

plants, hospitals, and other installations were set up by the oil company. The first regular police force in the whole southeastern Persian Gulf region is now being established, paid out of the oil revenues. As a result of the economic growth of the state, a British government representative is now permanently stationed in the area, and the first modern bank has opened its offices at Doha, which is assuming some of the functions of a capital city.

Qatar's revenues from oil royalties are estimated to have been about $4,200,000 in 1951. A profit-sharing scheme between the company and the sheikh took effect in September, 1952, and, based on current petroleum production and prices, Qatar's share in the future annual profits is estimated at about $12,000,000.[13]

Impact of Oil Development

From the descriptions of recent visitors it appears that cessation of warfare must precede the effective development of the resources of the Trucial Coast. The drawing of permanent boundaries will be a prerequisite for a truce on land as well as for the division of royalties and possible profit participation schemes. There may already be agreement on some coastal points for boundary delimitation (Table I); inland, perhaps because of the absence of marked physical features, there seem to be no traditional points that might assist in the establishment of boundaries. Some sheikhs are reported to be ready to agree to definite boundaries; for, as Codrai[14] reports, "their appetites [are] wetted [*sic*] by concession subsidies." Writing about the same time, Sir Olaf Caroe[15] remarks that "there will be a scramble to assert and establish rights over land which may be disputed between two or more Shaikhs . . . The worst instincts . . . may then have full play." So far, no announcements of definite boundary decisions or of a general truce in the land fighting have been made, and all the available evidence appears to confirm Sir Olaf Caroe's pessimistic prediction. Meanwhile, for example, the concession of Abu Dhabi reads (translated from the Arabic): "And if in the future there should be carried out a delimitation of the territory belonging to Abu Dhabi . . . then the area (of this Agreement) shall coincide with the boundaries provided in such delimitation."[16] The Bedouins of Trucial 'Oman and their rights and ambitions further complicate the problem; for many of them roam also over territory that may be part of Saudi Arabia, or 'Oman, or Qatar, or possibly even Aden Protectorate.

[13] Calculated from the *Petroleum Press Service*, Vol. 19, No. 10, London, October, 1952, p. 356.

[14] R. A. Codrai: 'Oman, Including the Trucial Coast, *Canadian Geogr. Journ.*, Vol. 40, 1950, pp. 184–192; reference on p. 192.

[15] Wells of Power (London, 1951), p. 22.

[16] Quoted in *Petroleum Press Service*, Vol. 19, No. 1, January, 1952, p. 6.

BOOK TWO

DESERT WARFARE

CHAPTER V

ALTHOUGH a large-scale tribal war, involving hostilities between rival sheikhs, has not occurred in the Trucial Oman territory since 1940, occasional raids by nomadic tribes take place from time to time. These affairs are very different from tribal wars, and usually not more than fifty men are engaged in a village raid. A night is chosen when the moon is in the first quarter, since this gives them sufficient light to reach their objective, yet makes it easy for them to conceal themselves. At midnight, or in the early hours of dawn, the raiders will steal towards the outskirts of the town or village they intend to attack, tethering their camels in the shadow of a building or clump of palms. The nearest houses will be raided first, and any slaves, children, livestock or goods and chattels they find will be carried off. Sometimes a woman's screams will give the alarm, and the sheikh's guards rush to the spot before the raiders have time to get away. A pitched battle in the desert then takes place, no quarter being given by either side. Most raids are so carefully planned beforehand, however, that the raiders often escape with their booty before the alarm can be raised.

During the time that I was stationed at Sharjah, only two serious raids were made on local villages. On one night in January, however, a daring raid was made on the R.A.F. and American camps and some medical stores stolen. The medical encampment was situated on a hill about half a mile from the main camp in which all the military and R.A.F. units were centrally situated. It was thus in a rather lonely position, although it was surrounded by a strong fence of barbed-wire. In this camp were the hospital, sick quarters and the Medical Officer's room. The M.O. was suddenly awakened in the early hours of the morning by someone tugging at his blanket. He seized a revolver from under his

721 pillow and fired twice at a shadowy figure which darted out of the tent, and then gave the alarm. The emergency floodlights were switched on, and shortly afterwards a truckload of Indian troops reached the camp and began to fire into the darkness, but the raiders had fled. In the morning it was discovered that hundreds of blankets, sheets, provisions and some hospital equipment, including chairs, had been stolen. There was a piece of bloodstained cloth on the barbed-wire, suggesting that one of the raiders had been winged. We felt rather sorry for the M.O., but could not help smiling at the thief's impudence in attempting to steal his blanket while he slept.

694 The Sheikh of Sharjah was approached by the Political Officer and told politely that he would be held responsible for the raid, since it had occurred on his territory. As the value of the stolen goods totalled something like £100, Sultan bin Saqr decided very 694 quickly that something must be done. Like many of the sheikhs, 151 he employs several skilled trackers. These men are the detectives of the desert, and have an uncanny knack of hounding down a criminal. Footprints mean everything to them, and it is said that they can tell the age of a camel, and the district to which it belongs, from the shape of its spoor. They can distinguish the feet of a woman from those of a man, and even reconstruct from the depth of a foot-impression what a person was doing at a particular time; they can also assess fairly accurately when the footprints were made. In his *Alarms and Excursions*, Bertram Thomas tells an amusing story which illustrates the trackers' skill; it was first told to me by Haji Williams, an old English adventurer who has spent fifty years in the desert and has now turned Mohammedan and married an Arab wife.

The incident occurred in Bahrain. An old Arab merchant was very worried about the non-return of his daughter from the market. As she did not return that night, the following day he hired a professional tracker and told him to find her. The tracker soon came upon the footprints of the merchant's daughter, but by the side of them he also found a thin trail in the sand, as if made by some kind of blunt instrument. At first he was puzzled, then enlightenment came to him, and he returned to the merchant to inform him that his daughter had spent the night in the desert with a man. The merchant was so shocked and enraged at hearing this that when eventually his daughter put in an appearance he refused to allow her to enter his house. Falling on her knees,

ment of 'the hooks'. A thief condemned to this terrible sentence may well blench. He is dropped from a high wall or tower on to sharp hooks which project from the wall. With his limbs securely skewered, he is left hanging in the pitiless sun until the vultures end his misery, leaving a whitened skeleton as a warning to wantons. Influential prisoners are cast into the palace dungeons without light or food, and garrotted quietly in the night by their gaolers. Branding and flogging are also common forms of punishment in Arabia.

A fair amount of desert raiding is still carried on in the Jebel Shamailiyah district, the range of mountains between Oman and Muscat, and at Sinash, a lonely town in the hills, the *Wali*, or Sultan's Viceroy, has been obliged to use draconian means of dealing with brigands, who sometimes resort to ransom and are a menace to peaceful merchants who use the pass. Not long ago one of the Sultan's brothers was abducted and carried off into the hills. The ransom demanded—a heavy one—was paid, but a year later the ringleader and several of his men were caught by the Sultan's trackers. They suffered some unpleasant tortures before they were finally put out of their sufferings by being hanged. Their property was confiscated and their unfortunate relatives were obliged to pay several time the amount of the ransom. Crime does not pay in Arabia, unless you are on the winning side. Yet the bandit and the camel raider persist in their vocations in spite of all discouragement. The Arab is prepared to fight—to the death, if necessary, for that which he steals, and this is a spirit which all Arabs admire.

Young Arab boys and girls, as well as slaves and Persian servants, are sometimes carried off by the raiders, and at one time I was obliged to provide an armed guard for the Fort bearers, as they were terrified to return to Sharjah at night, a distance of one mile, unless accompanied. Haider, my personal bearer, a youth of fifteen, told me that he had once been attacked at night, and for a time I allowed him to sleep in one of the mess rooms. High prices are fetched in the slave market for young people, who are sold to merchants or pearling fleet owners and treated little better than negro slaves. A fifteen years old Persian boy may fetch as much as 2,000 rupees, and a girl about 1,500. Negroes fetch only half this amount. The British authorities are aware that a traffic in slaves is carried on in Oman, but claim that they have been unable to obtain any evidence of it. Since I have met slaves who complained to me that they had been abducted and sold in the market, and once

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

There were no tribal wars during my stay at Sharjah, one of the reasons for this being the shortage of ammunition. The sheikhs are allowed a small ration of ammunition for defence against desert raiders, but this is insufficient for purposes of war. The Arabs were obliged to find other means of obtaining bullets. Thefts from the R.A.F. and American camps were frequent, and on one occasion several thousand rounds were stolen. The culprits were never caught, but some of the ammunition was later traced to the private armoury of a local sub-sheikh. Condemned ammunition stocks provide another source of supply. When the R.A.F. dumped a hundred cases of condemned .303 bullets into the creek, Arab pearl divers who had been waiting in readiness plunged into the water and brought most of it ashore.

In the heart of the desert, away from towns or villages, the shortage of ammunition often proves a hardship to the tribes, who rely on their rifles for much of their food supplies. They are thus obliged to manufacture their own cartridges, filling them with a home-made gunpowder obtained from the *ashgar* bush, the stems of which contain saltpetre. It is not a very satisfactory preparation, and many of the hunters have blown themselves up, but that has not proved a deterrent.

The Arab is a born fighter; as a child he learns to handle the curved *hangar*, or dagger, and to shoot gazelle with the silver damascened rifle which his father stole from the British. They are good shots, cunning in guerilla warfare; they will lie flat on their bellies, half-hidden by the scrub, and approach their enemies like snakes. Unfortunately they take very poor care of their arms; their rifles become corroded and clogged with dirt and are apt to explode in their faces when fired. Yet their daring tactics and fanaticism make them a formidable fighting force, and the sheikhs' armies, recruited from amongst the wild tribesmen, would prove a serious obstacle even to trained modern armies if the Arabs were united.

As long as the present sheikhs are in power, and the British Residency Agent, the Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak (who has retired to his estates at Quait since this was written), exercises authority at Sharjah, tribal war is unlikely to break out on the Trucial Oman coast. The Khan Bahadur controls a large body of Arab spies in every town, hamlet and camp, and the slightest whisper of a revolt reaches him with little delay. In any event, war between the town sheikhs, who are for the most part related

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

721 [361] [620] to one another by marriage, is extremely unlikely. Internecine war is likely only between the nomadic tribes who roam the desert and avoid the towns; they live in goats' hair tents, congregating around the wells and oases in the hot season. The largest and most powerful of these tribes in Oman is that of the Beni Qitab, whose Sheikh is the Mohamed Ali, a fine, tall, white-bearded warrior with a hawk-like nose and piercing eyes. As he is at present on friendly terms with the Khan Bahadur, war against the town sheikhs is unlikely.

CHAPTER VI

THE last war of any importance, as I have stated, was that between Sharjah and Dubai in 1940. The cause of the war was a long-standing feud between the tribes of Bani Yas (Dubai) and Qasimi (Sharjah). There was also a dispute over territorial limits claimed by the sheikhs. The sheikhdom of Dubai is composed of two distinct districts; Dubai town proper, on the west of the creek, and Dera, on the north side. The largest and better-built houses, mostly inhabited by Indian and Persian merchants, as well as the more important shops of the pearl brokers, carpet sellers and gold-smiths, are situated in Dubai town. Here one finds cool, clean narrow streets with high walls, often overhung with Persian rugs to keep off the sun, and pleasant open shops where one may buy anything from a five hundred years' old Bokhara rug or a brass-bound Quaiti chest, to an American wrist-watch or a roll of bread. In the poorer section of Dera, where the fishermen and coolies live, there is a native bazaar and several long streets of shops, but these are dirty, dark and infested with flies. There one may buy items of gaudy Arab clothing, tobacco leaves, and dried food, including fish, spices, nuts, ghee butter, henna bark and rice. Some alley-ways are devoted entirely to silversmiths and tinsmiths; the latter are clever craftsmen and can make almost any domestic utensil out of an empty petrol can.

For several hundred years Dubai (which includes, besides the town, several villages and a tract of desert of about fifty square miles), has been ruled by the Al Bu Falaah branch of the Bani Yas clan, who are related to another Al Bu Falaah family, the sheikhs of Abu Dhabi (the 'Place of Gazelles'). Rivalry between the sheikhs of Dubai and their cousins in Dera, on the other side of the creek, may be traced back as far as 1850, when the Ak Bu Mahair family, their cousins, intrigued for ownership of the region. The Mahair were notorious pirates. A British gunboat had occasion to land a ship's crew at Dera to investigate an attack on a merchant ship in Dubai waters. Soon after the sailors from the gunboat had landed they were waylaid in a dark side street and murdered; as a

619 reprisal, the gunboat shelled Dera Town, destroying many houses
622 and killing several of the inhabitants. The British Government then confirmed Maktum bin Buti, of the Bani Yas tribe, as Sheikh of the whole of Dubai, including Dera. Since then there has been unmitigated rivalry between the two houses.

622 The present ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Said bin Maktum, a grand-
721 son of Maktum bin Buti, is a peaceably disposed ruler, but his wife, Husa, or Umm Raschid (mother of Raschid) is a combination of Catharine the Great and Boadicea, and is ambitious into the bargain for her two sons, Raschid and Khalifa. In 1940, following an intrigue against the Sheikh of Dubai, a member of the Mahair family was obliged to flee from Dubai and took refuge with the Sheikh of Sharjah, claiming his protection. Husa demanded that he be handed over to her, but this Sultan bin Saqr resolutely refused to do, contending that such an act was against all the traditions of his race. Feeling between Sharjah and Dubai had run rather high for several years, partly over a dispute as to which sheikh should have suzerainty over Hera, a minor sheikhdom, and partly because Sheikh Said bin Maktum disputed Sultan bin Saqr's succession to the sheikhdom of Sharjah.

The war which broke out over this incident lasted for several months, and was mainly guerilla in its tactics, although siege was laid to Dubai and the town was gallantly and successfully defended under the generalship of Husa herself, an event almost unparalleled in Arab history. It appeared that her husband had not wanted a war at all, and had tried to persuade his ministers to call a conference with Sultan bin Saqr and settle their quarrel by negotiation. This move not proving successful, the Sheikh of Dubai shut himself up in his room and refused to see anyone. His sons were not keen on fighting, either, and Raschid the elder, a pleasant, cultured man of thirty, continued his life of social ease, visiting his gardens by motor-car, adding to his collection of wives, and smoking his tiny-stemmed pipe. Husa was so infuriated by their indifference that she tore the veil from her face, donned sword and trousers, and took command of the fort and the army.

721 The total number of casualties on both sides numbered only about two hundred, dead and wounded, and at length the offices of the British Government were sought to mediate between the contestants. If the matter had been adjudicated by a court of arms, the laurels would probably have gone to Sharjah, which did much material damage to Dubai Town. At any rate, the peace

treaty was signed in the Sheikh of Sharjah's palace in the presence of the Political Officer, who thenceforward took up his official residence at Sharjah.

To understand the intrigues and quarrels which were part of the normal relationship between the Oman sheikhs, one has to glance back to the middle of the last century, when the sheikhdoms of Sharjah and Dubai came into prominence. The internal history of Trucial Oman at this time, relating chiefly to petty wars among the principalities, is confusing and monotonous, but it is not altogether without meaning or explanation. The central fact is a contest for the paramountcy between the sheikhs of Sharjah and Dubai; a contest in which, after the first, the power of Sharjah (which at one time owned most of the Trucial Oman peninsula), appeared to decline, and one by which the Sheikh of Dubai, who held the balance of power, profited so largely and so unscrupulously that the principals from time to time forgot their feud in an endeavour to exterminate him by united action.

Besides hostilities traceable to the antagonism between Sharjah and Dubai, there was, however, much desultory fighting due to predatory raids and the reprisals which they provoked, and some incidents of considerable importance arose out of aggressions by the Sheikh of Sharjah on his smaller neighbours. About 1840 it was clearly the ambition of the Sheikh of Sharjah to reduce Umm-al-Qaiwain, 'Ajman, and even Dubai itself to dependence upon himself.

In May, 1838, Sheikh Khalifa, of Abu Dhabi, in whose mind the succession of the Al Bu Falaah to Dubai still rankled deeply, made a sudden raid upon that place in the absence of the inhabitants at the pearl banks. He captured a tower upon the sea face and, after placing a garrison of his own in it, withdrew. On receiving news of the incident, the Al Bu Falaah at once returned from the pearl fishery and, assisted by Sheikh Sultan-bin-Saqr the First of Sharjah, dislodged the intruding Bani Yas after three days' operations; they also destroyed the tower. Bickering followed, but in the end a settlement was reached, and the boats of Dubai and Abu Dhabi were enabled to return to the pearl banks before the close of the season.

In 1839 a blood-feud arose between the people of Dubai and those of Umm-al-Qaiwain, in which the Sheikh of Sharjah interposed. A year later the hand of Maktum-bin-Buti, Sheikh of Dubai, was shown in the domestic affairs of the Qasimi principality

a number of the camels which had been collected for safety at Dhaid while their owners were absent on a foray in the Batinah district.

In November, 1843, in consequence of an attack by Ghafalah on a Dubai caravan, Sheikh Maktum carried fire and sword into the country of that tribe and of the Na'im, who were allies of Sheikh Sultan-bin-Saqr, which led to a rupture between the two sheikhs. An inhabitant of Sharjah having been killed by the hand of a brother of Sheikh Maktum, a crisis again occurred, and again passed over harmlessly. Finally, a direct collision took place in the interior between the Ghafalah and the Sheikh of Dubai and several men were killed on either side. The Sheikh was victorious but lost the sight of one eye.

Petty tribal wars continued throughout the century. They were never on a large scale or serious enough to interfere with British interests in the Gulf, because the sheikhs were so jealous of one another that to combine was out of the question. The political game was played at its wiliest, and the practice of a sheikh was to play one ally off on another. If they had only acquired sufficient wisdom to settle their disputes amicably, co-operate on such matters as land reform, agriculture and water supply, the Oman Coast to-day might be a flourishing centre of Arab life. Instead of this, the major part of it is uncultivated desert, because the people have no incentive to irrigate the land and plant cereals and vegetables; that this can be done with considerable success is evidenced by the flourishing gardens at Sheikh's Wells and at Ras-al-Khaimah.

It has never been the policy of the sheikhs to better the lot of their subjects, however; as long as the people are unemployed for half the year, they can be relied upon to work hard at the pearl banks during the pearling season, and thus make enough money to carry them on for several months without working. It is a pernicious system, but the pearling-fleet owners argue that if the people were regularly employed on other occupations, such as agriculture or sheep rearing, they would have no desire to go to the pearl banks and the industry would languish for want of labour.

Another reason for the gradual cessation of tribal wars was the pearling industry, which is the most important feature of Arab life in the Gulf, and which necessitates the absence of a large proportion of the male inhabitants at the pearl fisheries during the two seasons of the year—April to June, and July to October. Since from

peace, and obtaining reparation for maritime aggression committed in contravention of the agreement. Thus for a time order was restored in the Oman territories and the sheikhs were at liberty to wage war and undertake predatory raids, on condition that they did not permit any foreign power to intervene or acquire any interests, commercial or political, in the peninsula.

Towards the end of the first decade, however, another powerful influence began to make itself felt; the Ottoman Empire had already established its tentacles in Arabia, and in 1914, when British resources were strained to their utmost in various theatres of war, the Turks did their best to stir up strife in Oman. It was not until late in 1917 that Turkish forces withdrew from the Gulf, an event which coincided with Colonel Lawrence's victorious advance in north-west Arabia, culminating in the utter defeat of the Turkish army.

Although the name of Lawrence was legendary throughout Arabia at the end of the last war, it is remarkable that, in the south, at any rate, very few Arabs appear to have heard of him. Although I mentioned his name to scores of educated Arabs, the only ones who remembered his name and epic feats were the Khan Bahadur Abdur-bin-Razzak, the Sheikh of Sharjah, and Sheikh Mohammed bin Ali, ruler of the Beni Qitab. Even then there was no reverence or admiration in their recollection, but rather a tendency to regard his exploits as the amusing adventures of an eccentric foreigner. I believe this fact is mentioned by Douglas Glen in his book *In the Footsteps of Lawrence*, and it is a curious commentary on the Arab character.

During the 1939–45 war, especially when the British and Dominion armies were fighting for their lives at El Alamein and Tobruk, the enemy made several attempts to foment strife in Oman and despatched spies, by way of Persia and Iraq, to incite turbulent elements amongst the tribes. Their efforts were always unsuccessful, thanks to the firm loyalty of the sheikhs, and the brilliant counter-espionage organization set up by the Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak. His agents were scattered in towns and seaports throughout Oman and other parts of southern Arabia, and any stranger who landed on the coast was quickly trailed and his movements reported to headquarters at Sharjah. There was also an abortive movement to stir up a religious war, with the ultimate aim of freeing Arabia from the yoke of the foreigner, but this had very little success and was soon nipped in the bud. Italian or German airmen who flew over Arabia were nearly always forced

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CHAPTER XI

GENERALLY speaking, the Arab tribes of the Trucial Oman Coast are peace-loving people who are content to cultivate their date plantations, rear their herds of camels and goats, or spend two seasons of the year at the profitable pearl-fisheries. Tribal wars have become less frequent, and raids on villages are nearly always confined to the Bedouin and other nomadic tribes. Meeting an Arab in Sharjah or Dubai at the present day, it is hard to realize that his great-grandfather was in all probability a savage, ruthless pirate who plundered ships and murdered their crews without mercy. The ancestor of the present sheikh, and the forebears of most of his nobles were men of this calibre.

Piracy in the Persian Gulf has as ancient a history as pearl fishing and, like pearling, most of the able-bodied men of the coastal towns and villages were engaged in it. It was a safe and easy game in the days of the old sailing ships, when contrary winds would lure unsuspecting mariners to an uncharted reef, on which, perhaps, a light was showing. The Arab pirates, like the Cornishmen of old, were skilful wreckers. As soon as the ship grounded, scores of *bagrahs*, or rowing-boats, would set out from the shore, and from these the pirates would leap aboard; armed to the teeth and bent on murder, they rarely took prisoners, and would burn the ship before they left, thereby destroying evidence for a prowling frigate to discover. Yet, as one finds from a study of the interesting official documents on piracy which, still unpublished, lie in the archives of the Indian Government, fortune did not always favour the pirates.

It must be said in defence of the Trucial Coast tribes, that they are by nature peace-loving and friendly, and although among the seafaring classes piracy was a fairly common pastime for centuries (as it was amongst the English, French and Americans), it did not extend to the fishermen, pearl divers and townsmen until the end of the eighteenth century. The adoption of piracy by the latter classes was almost entirely due to the pressure and influence of the Wahabis, the fanatical sect which at that time over-ran Oman and

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

175 721 did all in its power to incite the tribes against foreign enterprise in the Gulf. This policy was not agreeable to all the tribes, many of which found trading with the infidel to be profitable; but others were easy tools in the hands of the Wahabis, notably the Quàsimi tribe, which was invariably eager for plunder of any sort.

The establishment of the Wahabis at Baraimi was followed by an increase of piracy and lawlessness at sea, which in India was ascribed chiefly to their influence. However, the Government of Bombay showed a degree of forbearance towards the pirates which it is difficult to understand. It appears to have been a standing order of the Government that none of their vessels in the Gulf should fire until they had been fired upon—a rule which placed their small and isolated cruisers at a dangerous disadvantage in dealing with an enemy whose favourite method of attack was by boarding; and offenders against this regulation were liable to heavy punishment. On one occasion Lieut. Gowan, of the *Fury*, 6 guns, having beaten off a number of boats which closed in upon him with hostile intent during a calm, received on arrival at Bombay a severe reprimand from the Governor in person 'for daring to molest the innocent and unoffending Arabs of these seas'.

To give one example of the methods of the pirates, I will quote the following incident, extracted from official documents:

On 21st October, 1808, the H.E.I. Company's cruiser *Sylph* of only 78 tons, mounting 8 guns, was approached by a fleet of large Arab vessels. She had been accidentally separated from the squadron which carried Sir Harford Jones and the members of his Mission to Persia, and Muhammad Hussain Khan, one of the Persian secretaries attached to this Mission, was actually on board the ship at the time. Precluded by regulations from using her guns until it was too late, the tiny vessel fell an easy prey to the crowd of boarders which the Arab ships hurled on her deck from their towering bows.

A wholesale massacre of her crews, who died fighting desperately, was the sequel. Among the few survivors of the action were the commander, Lieut. Graham, who fell, covered with wounds, down the fore hatchway, and the Persian secretary, who hid himself in a cabin locker. The lives of the remnant were saved by the sudden appearance on the scene of H.M.S. *Nereide*, Commodore Corbett, a frigate of 36 guns, at the sight of which the Quasimi took to flight in their own vessels, abandoning the *Sylph*,

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

and were pursued for some distance by the *Nereide*, but without success.

Piracy continued unabated until, in September, 1809, a naval and military expedition was sanctioned by the Governor-General of India (whose policy of appeasement had got him into trouble with the home government), the object of which was to destroy completely the sea power of the piratical tribes known under the general name of 'Quasimi', also to release British subjects and others held in bondage, and to obtain the return of several places on the Oman Coast to Sayid Sa'id, Sultan of Muscat, which had been taken from him by the Quasimi.

The expedition arrived at Muscat on 24th October, and was joined by gentlemen of Sir John Malcolm's Mission to Persia, who 'most handsomely volunteered their services'. After re-victualling, the expedition proceeded to Ras-al-Khaimah, which was reached on 11th November; but owing to the shallowness of the water it was obliged to anchor two to four miles from the town, according to their size. The action began when the British fleet fired on the *Minerva*, a captured vessel which the Arabs had mounted with twenty guns, and which was starting on a cruise. Heavy fire from the shore forts prevented her seizure, but she was burned. In the action the cruiser *Prince of Wales* went aground and was subjected to a fusillade from shore batteries.

On the 12th the town was heavily bombarded by the fleet, and on the 13th, under cover of a barrage, marines and sepoys were landed at the harbour mouth and waded ashore. After heavy hand-to-hand fighting the walls of the town were scaled and, at two o'clock in the afternoon, the centre of the town had been gained and the British flag been hoisted on the sheikh's palace. Thirty large war boats were set on fire, some booty obtained by individuals, but on the 14th, in consequence of a report that a large force of Wahabis was approaching from the interior, Colonel Smith, anxious to avoid further conflict with his small force, hurriedly re-embarked his troops.

During the entire action at Ras-al-Khaimah, two men were killed on board the *Prince of Wales*, and Captain Dansey of the 65th Regiment was slain by a spear which struck him in the neck while he was clearing a house in the town; the wounded numbered twenty-one. But for the screen formed by the smoke of burning houses the British losses would, it is said, have been much heavier.

175 721 Incidents like the above continued unabated throughout the century. In 1820 a general Treaty of Peace was signed, which included the submission of Sultan-bin-Saqr, Sheikh of Sharjah (who, on leaving the hospitality afforded him by the Sultan of Muscat, apparently took to piracy as a quick means of recovering his lost fortunes), and the Sheikhs of Dubai, Ras-al-Khaimah, Bahrain, and Abu Dhabi. Piracy abated somewhat in the next ten years, but in 1850 we hear of further attacks on British merchant ships, and depredations on shipping continued, in spite of severe reprisals and fines, until the end of the century.

It was the appearance of the steamship, with its greater speed, independence of winds, and heavier gun power, which really brought piracy to a close. The Arabs realized that it was suicide to attempt to pit their wooden ships and boats against modern sea power, and the few who stuck to piracy confined their attacks to smaller, unarmed sailing ships.

The establishment of order at sea was necessarily a gradual process, but by 1890 piracy had ceased to be a popular profession. There were sporadic outbreaks in the last few years of the century, and as late as 1905 a British merchant vessel was attacked. But the Wahabi influence had long been broken, the fight against iron-clad men-o'-war was unequal, and the old piratical tribes settled down once more to the safer occupation of fishing and pearl-diving.

Piracy is dead in the Persian Gulf, although isolated attacks on dhows still occur. As recently as 1944 a large Arab dhow, containing food supplies on its way to Dubai, was attacked by a native sailing ship and the crew murdered. The matter was immediately reported to the Political Officer, Captain Bird, who ascertained that the pirates came from a village on the Persian side of the Gulf, near Jask. Representations were made to the Iran Government, and it is believed that the culprits were apprehended and hanged, suitable compensation being paid to the dependents of the victims. To-day piracy is frowned upon by all sections of the community; even the sheikhs consider it is no longer respectable.

[433] 396 501 Fishing and pearling have replaced the more violent forms of sea traffic, and shipbuilding remains an important industry on the Trucial Coast. The war has held up supplies of timber and sail-cloth, which came from India, but several large boats have been built from stocks of old material. The largest dhows, which sometimes sail as far south as South Africa and can easily make the passage

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

poisoning the larvæ, would destroy the tribe's food supply. This produced more laughter, since the locust is only regarded as an occasional tit-bit and is not a regular part of their diet. The sheikh pulled his beard, roared with laughter at this sally, revealing his long, yellow fangs, and finally agreed to provide as many guides as the party required.

A shout from one of the guards caused Hadi to leap to his feet and run towards the entrance. He returned in a moment to inform us that a caravan of raiders, presumably *Badus*, had passed the encampment about a mile away. We hurriedly left the tent and were just in time to see the raiding party, which consisted of about fifty camels, disappearing in the dust at great speed. Hadi said they were moving in the direction of Dubai and probably had as their objective one of the numerous villages near the coast. Sheikh Mohammed denied that they were men of his tribe, but Tandy afterwards told me that there was some doubt as to the truth of this statement.

When we returned to the tent, a slave brought in bowls of warm camels' milk which were passed round the circle. It was very refreshing and had a sweet taste, though I did not relish drinking from the bowl after it had passed the lips of my exceedingly dirty hosts. In few, if any books on desert travel is the dirtiness of the Arabs referred to; this is either because the authors have become enured to their primitive surroundings and take them for granted, or else because they consider it bad form to allow such commonplace details to intrude into their art. Both St. John Philby and Mr. Bertram Thomas are liberal in their allusions to camel dung, but their awareness of the filth and odours of Arab towns is never made apparent to the reader. Unfortunately I was born with a fastidious mind and a nose as sensitive as an insect's antennæ, and no amount of admiration for the Arabs can make me oblivious of their habits, although some Arabs are far cleaner than many Europeans.

When the bowls of milk had been passed round we were pressed to partake of dates, covered thickly with flies, little squares of Turkish delight, chipatties with a coating of *ghi*, and good Arab coffee. After a smoke and some light conversation, we had more coffee, until Tandy, reminding the sheikh that we must take our departure, asked permission to leave. There was a very strong smell of camel in the tent; the creatures were tethered to ropes outside, and were growling and swearing because they were being

312 When one is travelling from well to well a
487 long rope is an essential article of equipment, for there is seldom any at the well-head itself. The water raised *en route* was warm and sulphurous, but in Wadi Qor, the pass through the Hajar Range, we found shallow pools of rain-water among the rocks, and although it must have been very stale it was considerably more palatable than the well-water. Wadi Qor is very rocky, and the three-tonner performed in an admirable manner, climbing rocks and moving forward at angles that must have been undreamed of by its makers. The party was alert and rather
• [721] light on the trigger, for tribesmen continue to raid caravans going through this pass, and
487 life is very cheap in 'Oman. The track improved towards the end of the wadi and opened out onto a sandy plain tinted a pale green by a sparse covering of grass and

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The Trucial Coast

133 The most typical feature of this mono-
502 tonously low and sandy coast is the khor, or
● 721 salt-water inlet. Most of these inlets are little more than ten feet deep, and boats other than those constructed by the maritime robbers of old were unable to approach with-

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TO 133 502 721

in two miles from their entrances. Thus it was that the pirate tribes were able to build their towns behind these natural booms, and to carry on their ruthless calling in defiance of the British and Portuguese navies — and to earn for their stronghold the much feared and romantic name, "The Pirate Coast".

TO 101 631 648 628 [527]

Trucial 'Oman, as it is called today, is ruled by six independent sheikhs, bound under old treaties with Britain to maintain a maritime truce for the prevention of piracy and slave-trading. Family feuds and inter-tribal quarrelling are as common among them as are the rusty, ancient cannon. Many of the latter are no doubt from British men-o'-war, and some are still used for ceremonial occasions, a party afterwards being despatched to retrieve the cannon-balls.

TO 361 504 439

Unspoiled by time, Sharjah is one of the principal little towns, but it lacks the enchantment of Dibai, a picturesque centre a few miles along the coast to the west. A wide, shallow inlet divides Dibái and its waterfront of quaint little coffee-houses, and provides anchorage for dhows that bring transshipped goods from other continents. In the large market-place, spread on either side of the inlet and connected by a ferry-service of numerous little pole-propelled craft, the bedouin, with his henna-dyed beard and ancient rifle, can be seen fingering everything that is on show, from modern radio sets to ladies' lingerie, but he has little use for some of the strange products of the West.

TO 443 501 B 302 1111

p. 191 (A)

S: Cadral G-3 (1948-1950) 1950 MK1 Oman
Trucial Oman MK4
Bedouin MJ4

000 Arab World, is made ghastly by this local scarcity of water, and they can be seen watching, and sometimes licking, the gloss which is the only indication of a slight trickle from a hole in the side of a house. At other times they try to keep cool by lying at the edge of the sea, until their thirst proves too great, and they take their last drink.

Slavery still Exists

The population is predominantly Arab, but Persians, Baluchis, Somalis and Negroes make up a considerable section of the coast-dwellers. Many of the latter are slaves, and in this polyglot society, practising polygamy and concubinage, the Arab's blood is seldom free from non-Arab strains. Although the importation of slaves from Africa and Persia is officially said to have been abolished, there is no reason to suppose that this form of trading has ceased entirely; for Britain no longer exercises her right to search vessels, and the chances of any law-breaker getting caught are very small. In addition, children are still abducted from their villages by bedouin raiders, and are sold in the market at Biraimi, the neutral region in the desert about one hundred miles to the

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?: Codrai G-3 (1948-1959) 1950 MK1 Oman
Trucial Oman MK4
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south of Sharjah. Certificates stating that they have been born into slavery (a lucrative business for the signatories) are purchased by their owners and the unfortunate victims may then be legally transferred elsewhere in 'Oman, or even to Saudi Arabia, where they are said to fetch a higher price. Most of the slaves who *are* the children of slaves are well treated, and are faithful to their masters, so that their existence is often a better one than that of the poorer 'Omanis.

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Within the next few years the search for oil is going to open-up this little-known country, and 'Westernization' will suddenly appear before its people; but, with conditions as they are it will be some time before the way is prepared for the geologists and drillers. In the meantime, their appetites wetted by concession subsidies, the rulers of the Trucial Coast are fixing the boundaries of their lands, in order to avoid battle in the event of "liquid-gold" being found. In 'Oman proper it is more difficult, and unless the Imam and those in control of the rebel tribes can be won over, they may be expected to oppose not only the oil people but the Sultan himself.

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